TRU TeamWorks

August 16, 2007

WIPP Quick Facts
(As of 8-16-07)

5,990
Shipments received since opening

50,013
Cubic meters of waste disposed

92,586
Containers disposed in the underground

Standard Waste Box Retrieval Update

WIPP crews continue to move columns of waste containers from Room 6 of disposal Panel 4 to adjacent rooms 4 and 5 underground at WIPP.

On August 3, the New Mexico Environment Department directed the DOE Carlsbad Field Office to retrieve a standard waste box from the repository which included a non-certified drum containing transuranic waste that was not fully characterized to the WIPP program requirements. The error was discovered after the standard waste box had been emplaced in Room 6 for disposal. By then, 36 rows of waste had been placed in front of it.

The above file photo shows contact-handled TRU waste stacked in columns underground at WIPP.

Waste handling, maintenance and mining crews have been working in four shifts since August 8 to remove the standard waste box, which ultimately will be returned to the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Facility at the Idaho National Laboratory, the originating shipper.

By Thursday morning, 26 rows had been removed from Room 6 and permanently emplaced in rooms 4 and 5 of Panel 4.

TRU waste shipments to WIPP have been suspended until retrieval operations are complete.

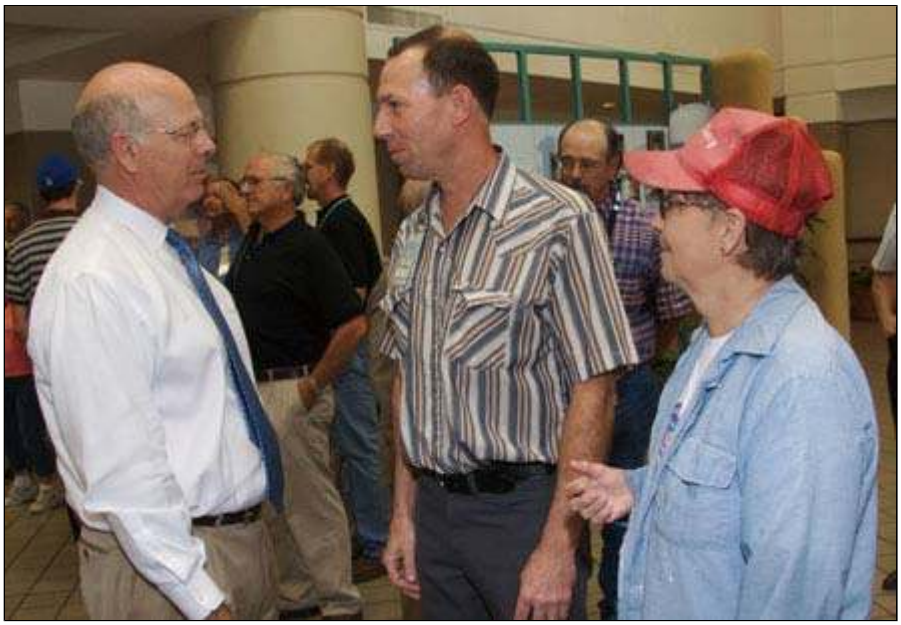
Congressman Pearce visits Skeen-Whitlock Building

The Skeen-Whitlock Building was bustling with activity on Aug. 10. Congressman Steve Pearce was greeted by a crowd of more than 75 people that included local officials, WIPP employees and other community members.

Congressman Steve Pearce

After a few brief introductory comments, Pearce eagerly invited questions from the crowd. In his responses, he addressed a number of topics, including WIPP accomplishments, community support, education, nuclear energy, and the war in the Middle East. He closed his speech with an appeal for those present to continue to support America's troops.

"Whatever your stand is on the war," Pearce said, "Whether you're for it or not, it's important to support the troops."

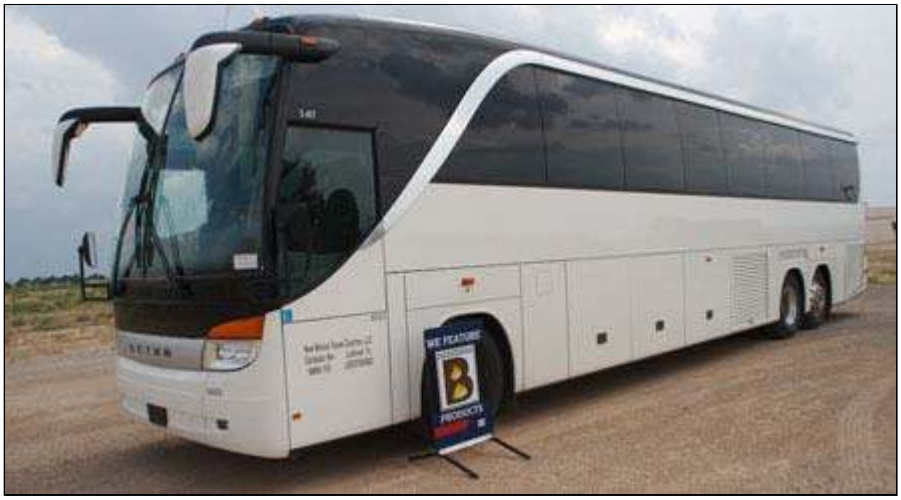


Congressman Steve Pearce visiting with WIPP employee Jerry Golden (WTS) and Carlsbad City Councilwoman Louise Tracy.

Afterward, Pearce spent time speaking to attendees one-on-one, shaking hands and taking pictures with guests.

Pearce, who is from Hobbs, N.M., has been representing New Mexico's 2nd Congressional District since 2002.

WIPP bus testing biodiesel fuel



DOE to evaluate WIPP for low-level waste disposal

The DOE has issued a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the disposal of Greater-Than-Class C and Class C-Like Low-Level Radioactive Waste. At present, there is no path for disposal of these wastes. Among the proposed alternatives is deep geologic disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

WIPP is one of nine candidate DOE locations nationwide being evaluated. If selected, legislative and regulatory changes would have to be made to allow the waste to be disposed in the WIPP repository.

About 50 people attended a public scoping meeting about the EIS in Carlsbad, N.M., on Aug. 13. It was the first of nine such meetings scheduled throughout the country in the next five weeks.

Construction alert: Please use Highway 62/180

For WIPP employees who use Highway 128 to commute to work, you probably already know about the major construction occurring. The project is expected to last for up to nine months.

If possible, please use the North Access Road and Highway 62/180, instead. These roadways have paved emergency lanes on the edges, if needed. In addition, Highway 62/180 is a divided four-lane highway, so it is less likely that you will be delayed.

If you must use Highway 128, remember that your safety and the safety of the construction workers depend on everyone following the speed limits and obeying posted safety signs.

With an eye toward alternative fuel use, WIPP and New Mexico Transportation (NMT) are conducting a pilot project to test the performance of biodiesel fuel. A bus used to transport employees to and from the WIPP site began using B20 biodiesel fuel in early July. B20 is a blend of 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent standard diesel fuels.

“Testing biodiesel in a commuter bus provides an excellent venue to evaluate its performance, and hopefully, to demonstrate that use of biodiesel can be cost effective, provide performance and improve our environmental footprint,” says WRES employee Judy McLemore, who is a member of WIPP’s Pollution Prevention Committee. “With NMT’s full support, we were quickly able to move forward with planning and initiating the test.”

Preparations for the project were made in June. A source for the fuel was identified and the organizations set up a temporary fueling station at the NMT facility. Since the pilot project began, the bus has continued to operate normally and there are signs that the biodiesel fuel is making the filtration system cleaner.

Biodiesel is derived from plant oils such as cottonseed, canola, or soybeans. The biodiesel used in the pilot project is derived from canola plants grown in the United States.

The use of biodiesel fuel is seen not only as a step toward reducing dependence on foreign oil, but also as an opportunity to reduce emissions. As long ago as May 1998, a study done by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the DOE on urban buses found that B20 biodiesel reduces carbon dioxide emissions by more than 15 percent.

The biodiesel pump is powered by solar energy.

In addition to the benefits of the fuel, the bus is filled up by a pump that is powered by the sun. In fact, there are no electrical wires that run to the pump that was set up for the project. A solar panel on the unit charges a battery used to operate the equipment. When the battery is charged, the solar power turns off, so the battery is not damaged.

The pilot project is anticipated to continue for two to three months. The test bus’ performance, acceleration, fuel efficiency, and emissions will be tracked and compared to comparable data for another bus using standard diesel fuel. If successful, use of the alternative fuel may extend beyond the pilot project and be adopted as a standard practice.

Information provided by: Zach Graham, WTS

WIPP provides nesting ground for American Coots

WIPP's sixteen-square-mile land withdrawal area is home to many species of plants and animals, but the American Coot is something new.

Commonly called a mud hen, the bird was recently identified in the storm water collection pond just south of the WIPP parking lot. A mother and three young ones have made this pond their home.

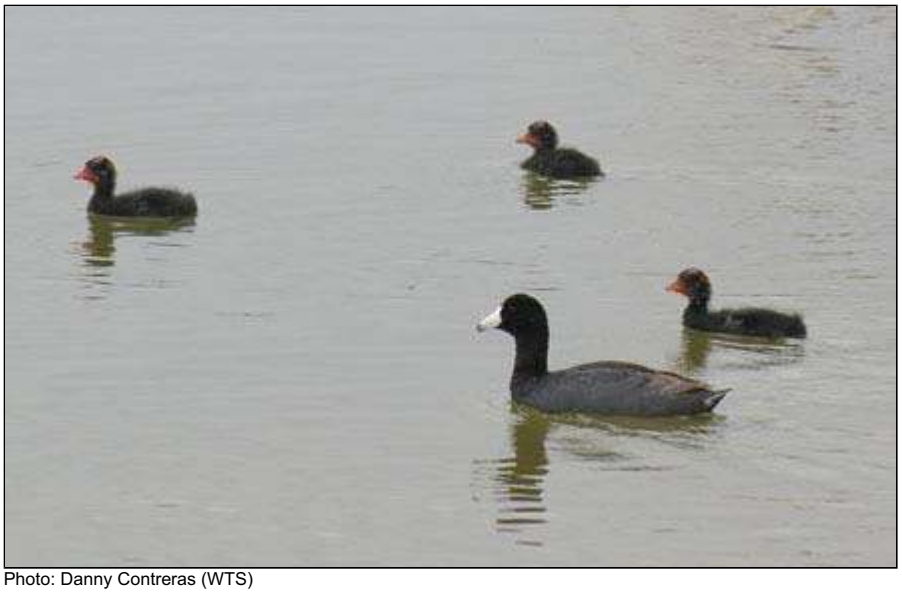


Photo: Danny Contreras (WTS)

The lined pond was one of several constructed a couple of years ago to collect storm water run-off from WIPP's facility surface area. Although a lot of the pond's water evaporates, with higher-than-normal precipitation the last two years, water has remained year-round.

"Amazing what putting a little watering hole in the desert will do," says Mike Oliver, CBFO's facility systems engineer.

Oliver was one of the first to identify the birds.

Interested in WIPP?

If you would like to be notified when TRU TeamWorks is updated with the latest information about WIPP, send an e-mail message to TRUTeamWorks@wipp.ws.

EXO project moving forward

Four down and two to go. Four clean room modules for the Enriched Xenon Observatory (EXO) project have been successfully delivered to the WIPP underground.

The four modules, weighing between 13,000 and 17,900 pounds, were lowered 2,150 feet below the earth's surface and transported by a 41-ton forklift to the north end of the mine.

The modules arrived in two separate shipments in July. The shipment of the two remaining modules will occur at a later date.

For a more detailed explanation of the EXO project, see the July 19 issue of TRU TeamWorks or visit the EXO website at www-project.slac.stanford.edu/exo.

The U.S. Department of Energy
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

Please send comments and/or suggestions to: TRU TeamWorks